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ABSTRACT

The guide examines the components of instructional units. Such units serve as a means for organizing the school year. The unit plan format discussed here includes an overview, a content outline, and listings of expected learning outcomes, content activities, concluding activities and application of knowledge, and materials and resources. The majority of the guide consists of a sample plan for a unit about the family which is suitable for first grade. (RJC)

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Developing Instructional Units for the Primary Classroom

Laverne Warner and Kenneth Craycraft

Teaching often depends on the organizational skill of the teacher in the classroom. Instruction is facilitated when teachers have a plan of action to follow. If a teacher is assigned to teach second grade, for example, she must conceptualize plans for the scope of the entire year--how she will begin instruction in September and how learning will end in June. What happens in between may depend on her ability to formulate goals and objectives which are appropriate for the second graders she teaches. Ellis, Mackey, and Glenn (1988:80) suggest that overlooking the development of long-range plans "leads to needless repetition, gaps in content coverage, inability to finish the prescribed course of study in a year's time, and lack of meaningful attention to individual differences."

One way that educators organize for the school year is to develop specific topics of study, usually referred to as *units*. Planning units of study in classrooms has been a practice since the time of John Dewey who advocated the presentation of integrated experiences instead of segmenting the learning into separate bits of information (Seefeldt and Barbour, 1986). Taking time before school starts each year to determine what units will be presented will assist teachers in the development of a comprehensive plan for the year. Failure to formulate this comprehensive plan would be like taking an extensive vacation without a road map. The "road map" called unit planning is critical to the success of the school year.

Many school districts prepare units for teachers of specific grade levels because they recognize the importance of having a written statement of long-range goals. Units require that greater attention be given to outlining, sequencing, material acquisition, and evaluation and, therefore, school districts

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occasionally require teachers to serve on curriculum committees during the summer months in order to prepare unit guides or curriculum guides which may be followed by all teachers in the district. Outlining the topics for the year and setting up workshops or seminars whereby teachers can discuss the topics they will be teaching is a two-step process which assists teachers in envisioning the year-long goal structure (Ellis, Mackey, and Glenn, 1988).

So how are units selected? One procedure to use is to correlate the unit topics with textbooks in the specific grade being taught. If a school district has a social studies textbook for a specific grade level, then developing social studies units which relate to the units in the textbook is a fairly easy process to follow. Difficulties arise, though, when textbooks are not available in certain curriculum areas. This is particularly true in the primary grades because most textbooks for young children are in the reading and mathematics curriculum areas while other subjects are overlooked.

As a consequence, teachers have to make independent judgments about the topics of study they wish to address during the year. Certainly, some of the units can relate to holidays as they appear throughout the school calendar. Teachers may also choose topics that they are interested in themselves and, often, these are more effective because teachers are more motivated to present the material to their students (Ellis, Mackey, and Glenn, 1988).

The development of units is not a particularly difficult process, but they do take some preparation time to complete. Once the topic has been selected, the next step is to plan activities, select materials and resources, obtain appropriate library books, and write the plan. The following format is

designed to assist the teacher in developing a unit from its foundation to completion:

Unit Plan Format

I. Overview

A. Topic to be taught

B. Age and/or grade level

C. Approximate number of days to complete

D. Necessity of topic and/or relationship to overall curriculum

II. Content Outline

Outline the major subject matter content to be taught (including sub-points, introduction and culminating activities).

III. Expected Learning Outcomes

A. Identify the specific knowledge objectives identifying what the students are expected to master (one objective per sub-point on the outline).

B. Identify the skills the students are expected to use (cutting, pasting, notetaking, writing, etc.).

C. Identify the attitudes which students are to acquire (cooperativeness, respect for, appreciation, etc.).

IV. Activities Designed to Achieve Expected Learning Outcomes

A. Motivating or Initiatory Activity

Describe the initial activity to be utilized to introduce the topic (poems,

bulletin boards, puppets, pictures, etc.). The greater the motivation for students to learn about the chosen topic, the more successful the unit will be.

B. Content Activities

The teacher should describe one series of learning activities per unit sub-topic. Each activity planned should promote the achievement of the objectives stated earlier. Also, research supports the concept of variety. Be sure to vary the activities.

C. Concluding Activity(ies)/Application of Knowledge

The teacher should describe the activity(ies) designed to assist the students in synthesizing, categorizing and utilizing the information acquired (games, plays, letters, booklets, field trips, etc.)

V. Evaluation

A. Identify the technique(s) used to evaluate the knowledge acquired, as stated in the knowledge objectives.

B. Identify techniques used to assist student self-growth.

C. Identify methods that will assist in the measurement of student growth in attitudes, understandings and skills throughout the unit.

VI. Materials and Resources

Identify the materials, equipment, guest speakers, tools and/or facilities utilized throughout the unit. List each in the order of use in the unit.

The following is an example of how an unit should look once completely developed. The topic theme of family was chosen because of its importance as a topic in the primary grades. This unit is appropriate for first grade.

Example Unit Plan

I. Overview

A. The concept of family

B. First grade level

C. Approximately 7-10 class days

D. This topic fits the overall plan because of its importance on the quality of the child's life.

II. Content Outline

A. Motivation will be achieved through the use of a bulletin board.

B. Identifying the student's family

1. Members
2. Characteristics
3. Position (age) of members
4. Types of families

C. Roles/responsibilities of family members

1. Contribution of family members
2. Duties of each family member
3. Responsibilities of each family member
4. Traditional and non-traditional roles

D. Where families live

1. Houses in different places
2. Types of houses families live in
3. Each child's home

E. Family rules

1. Types of family rules
2. Need for family rules
3. Rules in each child's family

F. Family activities

1. Working activities
2. Fun activities

G. Concluding activities

The students will create and add to their family albums throughout the development of the unit.

III. Expected Learner Outcomes

A. Knowledge Objectives

1. After viewing pictures of animals and culturally different people (#3) the students will be able to verbally list two similarities and two differences of each group represented.

2. After hearing the stories (#2 & 4)), the students will be able to:
   a. verbally identify the two responsibilities of the 'school' family
   b. illustrate, through drawing, any brothers and/or sisters in their families

c. illustrate, through coloring, the position (by age) of each family member

d. verbally list two differences and similarities of their families to others in the class.

3. After hearing the classroom discussion on family responsibilities, the students will be able to :

a. write three contributions made by each family member

b. write two duties of each family member

c. illustrate one responsibility of each family member

d. illustrate one traditional and non-traditional role

4. After hearing the story (#5 or #6), seeing pictures of different houses (#8) and discussing differences in housing, the student will be able to:

a. verbally list two places where houses are located

b. identify, by listing, four types of family dwellings

c. draw a picture of his/her own dwelling

5. After hearing the story (#7) and discussing the need for family rules, each student will be able to:

a. list three types of family rules

b. write four reasons for family rules

c. list three of his/her family rules

d. list one rule found in all families

e. list one rule that is different in families

6. After reading the story (#10) and discussing family activities, each student will be able to:
   a. illustrate three family working activities
   b. illustrate three family fun activities

B. Skills

1. The students will utilize listening and observational skills.
2. The students will utilize fine motor skills by cutting, pasting, writing and coloring.
3. The students will utilize basic research skills by asking family members about themselves.

C. Attitudes and Feelings

1. The students will develop an appreciation for the differences among and between families.
2. The student will develop or maintain a positive attitude about his/her family.
3. The students will have a better understanding for the need of family rules.
4. The students will have a greater understanding of family roles.

IV. Activities to Achieve Expected Learning Outcomes

A. Motivating Activity

The teacher will place a picture of each child in the class on a bulletin board titled, "I'd Like You to Meet My School Family." This will be the starting point for a discussion on family characteristics. Early discussion should revolve around the similarities of the school family to their own families. The teacher should read Robotman and Friends at School. After reading the story, review the contents with the students stressing the relationships explored. Additional discussion should concentrate on

the similarities and differences of the school family and the 'real' family.

B. Content

1. Identifying Family

a. Family members

Show the students several pictures of animals and people that exemplifies groups (see M.L. #3). Lead a classroom discussion emphasizing how groups with common interests are like families. At this point, the students may desire to provide additional examples.

b. Characteristics/Position

Read the story to the children The Missing Honey and emphasize the family membership within the context of the story. Further discussions should center around individual families, noting membership and size. Follow this with a discussion of the age and/or position of each family member. At this point, individual family characteristics should be identified by size and composition to facilitate a discussion on similarities and differences. Once the discussion has ended, have the children color a picture of their family, including each member, to be placed in a notebook titled, "My Family Album" (see concluding activity).

c. Show pictures representing different family compositions (i.e. single parent, traditional, foster parents, grandparents, etc.) and lead classroom discussion of the different types. Be sure to emphasize that all family types are acceptable and avoid any value judgments

d. Follow the previous with a discussion of traditional and non-traditional family roles (relating to chores, responsibilities, etc.). Compare and contrast responses with others given.

2. Roles and Responsibilities of Family Members

To achieve each sub-points of this section, lead a classroom discussion emphasizing the responsibilities and contributions of each family member at home. After recording several examples, have the children illustrate through a drawing at least one role and responsibility they have. Also, have the students to ask their parents or guardians of other roles that may not have been mentioned.

3. Where Families Live

Read the story Home for a Bunny which explores different animal habitats. Follow this with a classroom discussion centering around the different types of homes (habitats) represented. The next phase of the discussion should center around the types of dwellings people live in (noting similarities and differences). All children should be made to feel positive about any place they live. At the end of the lesson, the child can cut a picture from a magazine which resembles his/her own dwelling and write a short story about the home. Should any child be unable to write a story, the teacher should assist as appropriate.

4. Family Rules

Read the story The Relatives Came which centers around a family moving in with relatives. Discuss and review the contents of the story with the children providing examples of the rules that would be needed for that many people to live in one house. Follow this by playing a game with no rules and continue until the noise and confusion becomes prohibitive. At this point, again review the need for rules. Finally, have the children to provide an example of a rule at home and one they should probably have.

5. Family Activities

Read the story The Pandas Take a Vacation which describes a family vacation. Review the story and have the children to relate the activities to the ones they have experienced. In this section, group rather than individual endeavors should be stressed. Following this segment, have the children relate work and fun activities they do (or would like to do) with their families. Drawings and stories should be encouraged (either drawn of cut from magazines).

C. Concluding Activities

1. The students should be compiling a notebook titled, "My Family Album," and pages should be added as the unit progresses. Included will be an immediate family tree, pictures, illustrations and stories that have been created throughout the unit.
2. As the albums are being reviewed, the teacher should stress the common characteristics of all families; helping one another, caring for others, working and playing together, etc. By reviewing in this manner, emphasis is placed on the affective rather than the material items. A short paper (when appropriate) should be assigned where students describe what their families mean to them.

V. Evaluation Procedures

A. Students will be given a pen and paper test with items created from the knowledge objectives. (i.e. List two ways your family is like all other families.)

B. Students will be evaluated through participation in group discussions.

C. Students will be evaluated by their contributions in their family albums.

D. Students can be evaluated from their papers describing what their families mean to them.

VI. Materials and Resources

1. Bulletin Board, "I'd Like You to Meet My School Family," which is a tree with the children's pictures placed on the limbs. These photos may be the school pictures or ones brought from home.

2. Robotman and Friends at School by Justine Korman. A Golden Book. New York, 1985

3. Picture file with animal and human families represented.

4. The Berenstain Bears and the Missing Honey, by Stan and Jan Barenstain, Random House. New York, 1987.

5. Home for a Bunny, by Margaret Brown. A Golden Book. New York, 1961

or

6. The Right House for Rabbit by Susan Saunders. A Golden Book. New York, 1986.
7. The Relatives Came by Cynthia Rylant. Bradbury Press. New York, 1985.

8. Pictures of different housing structures

9. Game of Concentration with no rules.

10. The Pandas Take a Vacation by Betty Maestro. Golden Book. New York, 1986.

11. Other materials being used:
    a. crayons
    b. paper--colored and plain
    c. yarn
    d. pencils
    e. glue
    f. scissors
    g. old magazines

Teaching units is an excellent procedure for keeping teachers and children on task during a specific time period. Once children have been motivated to a specific topic of study, they find self-satisfaction in participating in individual and group projects as the unit of study is completed. Because more time is allowed for unit study, the opportunity to complete a major project in the classroom increases the intensity of children's learning. Producing a miniature volcano, for example, provides learning about science (as they learn how volcanoes behave and how to ignite a model volcano), language (as children talk about their project and discuss how its completion), art (as the project is being constructed), math (as children measure or prepare the model to a preset scale. Certainly students' research skills are being enhanced as they search for the information they need about volcanoes to complete the project successfully. This prorotype is what Dewey referred to as "integrated learning."

Unit construction is as individualized as the people who teach them. They reflect the knowledge of the teacher, the interests of the children, the goals and objectives of the school district, current trends in curriculum planning, and the latest societal issues. Units form the structure around which lesson plans are

developed and taught. Not every lesson or classroom activity needs to be a part of a unit. But units do need to be a part of the curriculum. Without them, the structure of the classroom is disorganized and the long-range goals prepared early in the school year become useless.

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